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Resignation of an Elder

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THEOLOGICAL SEMIN

VOLUNTARY RESIGNATION,

As an acting Ruling Elder, in an Old School Presbyterian Church at the West: and calculated to prevent causes leading to such events, in our newly formed Churches.

So grave and serious a step, as voluntarily to give official notice of an unwillingness to act as a Ruling Elder in the Church of God, seems to require reasons in some measure commensurate with the act itself. Whether these reasons should be well founded and known only to the individual himself, to the Session from which he withdraws, or given to the public at large, must in some measure depend on the peculiarities connected with the transaction.

I became connected with this Church in 1843, by a certificate from a Church in the East, known as moderate New School, and more nearly allied to what is termed moderate Old School, than any other designation, and which class of Churches harmonize in most, if not all, that constitutes the fellowship of Christ's people in the Presbyterian Church.

"Let all things be done decently and in order," is a Divine injunction impressed on me, both by the Bible and the religious influences under which I was trained and brought into the Church of Jesus Christ.

Soon after my connection with the Church, I was elected the Superintendant of the Sabbath School, and whether it was conducted with as much order as it had been, and with as much success as could have been expected under the direction of any other member of the Church, is not becoming in me to say; but when events induced

ie voluntarily to resign that office, and give my reasons ublicly in the School,—the Pastor being present and holly unapprised of my intention to resign, addressed the School, explaining that although I had reason to complain f interference and action, being disconnected with the onsultation and co-operation of the Superintendant, yet ie was assured no disrespect was intended, and that in his pinion no one in the Church could have acted as Superntendant with more acceptableness, and under whose serices the School was more likely to prosper; and that he lesired me seriously to consider the subject and withdraw my resignation. I had weighed my position and resignaion with too much thought to accede to his request, or the voice of the School through its committee, to resume my office.

About this time, measures were taken to build a new Church edifice, and at the first congregational meeting for that object, I was chosen chairman.

During the meeting, a vote was about being taken on some business transaction to undertake the enterprise—the location, purchase of lots, or connected therewith—and as the vote was being taken, by rising, a person enquired "Do the ladies vote?" I answered as chairman "No." This was the instinctive conviction of my mind as soon as presented, and as the voters were in the act of rising, the decision was prompt and decisive. Suffice it to say, that for this decision I am responsible, and am to this moment fully satisfied of its correctness; but I am not responsible for the several discussions that have arisen in our congregational meetings since on that subject; for I have in no instance—save the last, and that incidentally—in any way introduced the subject; but when certain persons in our meetings have been at a loss either for argument, rhetoric, or eloquence, to secure their point, and have appealed to the Ladies to exercise their "inalienable right" to vote, I have defended my original decision, and enforced at each stage, by new evidence, that it was in accordance with the spirit of the Bible, in the sphere in which female influence should be exercised—the practice in our civil and political institutions—the reason and common sense of the thing, looking at the undue influences that may be used to gain

an erroneous expression of the female vote,—from the practice in many, if not most of our churches in the older parts of onr country where this subject has been matured more fully. And in order to add a little testimony here on this subject, I submit the following, to wit:

1st. From a work on the office of Ruling Elder in the Presbyterian Church, by Rev. Samuel Miller, D. D., of the Theological Seminary at Princeton, which will be generally deemed good authority in the Old School Church. On page 264 he says—

"In this choice the votes may be given either viva voce or by ballot. The latter method, however, is by far the most common, and is evidently the most proper for a variety of reasons, some of which will readily occur to every enlightened and delicate mind."

"Concerning the persons who are properly entitled to vote in such an election, there has been some diversity of opinion. That all the male members of the Church, in what is called "full communion" have this right, there can be no question. In this all are agreed. But it has been maintained, not indeed with the same unanimity, yet it is believed by a large majority of the most judicious and enlightened judges, and probably on the most correct principles, that all baptized members of the Church, who must of course be regarded as subject to the government and discipline administered by these rulers, are entitled to a voice in their election. And where there are *female heads of families*, who bear the relation of membership to the Church, in either of the senses just mentioned, and *who are not represented by some qualified male relative* on the occasion, it has been judged proper to allow them to vote in the choice of Ruling Elders, as is generally the case in the choice of a Pastor."

"There seems, however, to be some good reason for restricting the right to vote for Ruling Elders within narrower bounds than are commonly assigned in the choice of a Pastor. In that choice, in most congregations, all pewholders, and all stated worshippers who are stated contributors to the support of the Pastor, in their just proportion, whether baptized or not, whether willing to submit to the exercise of discipline or not, and whether of fair moral

character or not, are considered entitled to vote. But, in the election of a Pastor, there is one security against an improper choice, which does not exist in the case of a Ruling Elder; namely, that the call must be submitted to the Presbytery, and receive the sanction of that body, before it can be prosecuted. Whereas no such security exists in the case of a Ruling Elder."

"Accordingly, the General Assembly of the Church which met in 1829, in answer to a question solemnly referred to it by one of the Western Presbyteries, adopted and sent to the Churches the following judgment in relation to the subject: "Ought an unbaptized person who yet pays his proportion for the support of a congregation to be permitted to vote for Ruling Elders?" "It is the opinion of this general assembly, that the office of Ruling Elder is an office in the Church of Christ: that Ruling Elders as such, according to our confession of Faith, Book 1, on Government, Chapter 5, are the representatives of the people, by whom they are chosen, for the purpose of exercising government and discipline in the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ; that the discipline lawfully exercised by them, is the discipline exercised through them by their constituents, in whose name, and by whose authority they act in all that they do. To suppose therefore that an unbaptized person not belonging to the visible Kingdom of the Redeemer, might vote at the election of Ruling Elders, would be to establish the principle, that the children of this world, might through their representatives exercise discipline in the Church of God; which is manifestly unscriptural, and contrary to the standards of our Church. Resolved, therefore, that the question in the said overture be answered in the negative."

2d. From a work of Rev. Thomas Smith, Pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church of Charleston, S. C., exhibiting the rules and regulations in that Church. On page 110—

"Rule 5. By the resolutions in the Preamble, the election of Pastor, Clerk, &c., devolves on the *male* pewholders generally. In all such elections, two thirds of all *the male* pewholders shall be present, and four-fifths of that number shall be required to make an election."

"Rule 7. The spiritual affairs of the Church, such as the election and ordination of Elders, and all matters and things growing out of the same, shall be governed exclusively by the Pastor, Session, and *male* communicants in good standing, when not in contravention to the established forms of the Presbyterian Church in the United States."

3d. From a report of the proceedings of a congregational meeting of Rev. T. H. Skinner, D. D's. Church in the city of New York, in the New York Observer of Feb. 26, 1848—

"Moved by the Hon. B. F. Butler: The Rev. Thomas H. Skinner, D. D., pastor of this Church and congregation, having been appointed Professor of Sacred Rhetoric, &c., and having expressed his desire to resign the pastoral office; and the *male members of this Church* and congregation being now duly convened in public meeting, for the purpose of acting on his request, and having implored on their deliberations the Divine guidance and blessing; they have unanimously adopted the following resolutions."

These must suffice for want of room and access to other proper proof on this subject; but I trust enough will be gathered to shield me from having, in the decision referred to, given any just ground for offence, or for the subsequent evil effects in our society, growing out of this and other, as senseless, causes.

Besides these differences in our congregational meetings there were Sessional differences—probably in some measure influenced by, but not necessarily connected with the other.

A religious excitement of considerable extent was experienced in the church referred to, some two years since, when the question of qualifications for membership was a fruitful subject of argument, and unfortunately for unanimity, I was obliged to differ with my brethren as to the experience young converts ought to pass through in order to their admission to the church, both as regarded the safety of the convert, and the church; the experience since, may have produced a change of opinion on this and kindred subjects. I objected to the admission of persons under the excitement in a revival, on the next day after they entertained a hope, or at any very short period thereafter—

maintaining the necessity of a reasonable time, that the individuals might have an opportunity to test their own feelings, and whether they had indeed experienced a change of heart. Hasty admissions I objected to as unsafe to all concerned, but was overruled.

The question too, of frequent communion seasons in order to admit any one who might entertain a hope, I objected to as uncalled for, either for the good of the church, or the convert, or to secure the person to our church—for on the latter point I maintained the principle of letting every one be fully persuaded in his own mind, where he wishes to join God's people. The morbid sensibility that would urge any one, to extraordinary means to get into the church, and partake of the communion, ought in my opinion to be enlightened on that subject. However delightful and profitable it may be to engage in this command of our Saviour, "As oft as ye do this, do it in remembrance of me," there are other acts of devotion, and means of spiritual comfort to the enlightened pious heart to which it can resort, until in the regular and proper order, an opportunity is afforded to partake of the emblems of our Saviour's death.

Within a few months past a most serious procedure was in the course of consummation, which I allude to here for the double purpose of showing how I have been brought to differ with my brethren, and as a warning to such other church sessions as may see this narrative, and have like cases to adjust.

I will first quote the directions given in the Book of Discipline of the Presbyterian Church, then give the case.

"CHAPTER 4, SEC. 5. When a judicatory enters on the consideration of a crime or crimes alleged, no more shall be done, at the first meeting, unless by consent of parties, than to give the accused a copy of each charge, with the names of the witnesses to support it; and to cite all concerned to appear at the next meeting of the judicatory, to have the matter fully heard and decided. Notice shall be given to the parties concerned, at least ten days previously to the meeting of the judicatory."

"SEC. 10. When an accused person, or a witness, refuses to obey the citation, he shall be cited *a second time* and if he still continue to refuse, he shall be excluded from

the communion of the Church, for his contumacy, until he repent."

"SEC. 11. Although, on the first citation, the person cited shall declare in writing, or otherwise, his fixed determination not to obey it; *this declaration shall, in no case,* induce the judicatory *to deviate* from the regular course prescribed for citations. They shall *proceed as if no such declaration* had been made. The person cited may *afterward alter his mind.*"

Now for the case. Two members of the church, and both from among the young converts, hastily admitted some two years ago, were charged with a violation of the rules of the church, and subject to citation under the above ecclesiastical law. It was deemed by some members of the session that it was highly important an example should be made before the then approaching communion, when it was proposed the example should be made, in order to deter others who might become guilty of like offences.

A committee to wait on these persons was proposed, as a first step in order to bring them to repentance, or such promise of a reformation as should prevent the necessity of a citation at all.

I proposed that the minister in charge should be one of the committee, that by his ministerial influence we might more likely produce the change desired; but the prudential policy of avoiding so faithful a discharge of duty, lest he might become unpopular with the young persons, prevailed, and he was excused. I am sorry to say, his own views were in accordance with this course.

A committee of two were appointed. Their report in relation to one of the accused was such that the promises of amendment made, caused the case to be dismissed.

The other case was more embarrassing. No satisfactory promises were made, nor did the individual feel worthy to remain as a church member, and would prefer a dismission.

On this report of the case, several members, I think all that were present, except myself, were disposed to proceed at once, without citation, trial, or further effort to restore a backsliding member—to dissolve the membership—or to suit the after part of this narrative, to cause an *arbitrary, unlawful, and unsafe "Resignation"* of membership.

I opposed it on several grounds—among them,

1st. We were expressly prohibited by our constitutional book of discipline.

2d. That the character of the young member—the feelings of the relatives, and above all the eternal interests of the member, called for further effort to bring about a reformation, if the member was only a backslider; and upon the principle that the member never had been converted, the occasion should be used as a means of grace to bring about such a change of heart as to render the member a true christian. Strange as it may seem, neither the constitutional law, nor all these serious considerations weighed to alter the determined wishes of the committee, or minister present. It was urged that, at least, two of the absent members agreed in the opinion that it was lawful and best to cut off the member. I objected to the reported opinions of members who were absent, as influencing those present, for, those absent might be induced to change their views in a consultation with, and in, an organised session for so serious an object. I suggested a postponement to another time, when a fuller session might be present, but was opposed in this, as unnecessary, as the decision must be the same, with the known opinions of those absent.

It was with much reluctance a postponement could be secured; and only, or at least, after I had stated I should solemnly protest against their act, that it was effected.—Well, trace the issue. At the next meeting, with two additional members, the minister asked one of the members absent at the last meeting, his views of the case. He gave them; and no two men could scarcely go over the ground in review of the law, and necessity of citing the member, than I had done previously. Not a lisp, was it necessary for me to make, nor did one of the three, who were present at the former meeting, interpose one objection to the citation. It was ordered, and instead of condemnation, without trial, the opportunity was open for the use of means for the restoration of the member. Trace the result: The first citation was not obeyed: a second citation was served, and while the session were considering the case, and about to determine it by a vote, the member actually appeared. The interview was such as to suspend a decision, and hopes were entertained of a favorable issue. Up to the time of

ny ceasing to act, the case, so far as I had any knowledge, vas likely to result favorably.

So much I have thought proper to say on this case, in order to show some of the causes by which we differed, and the danger of acting without a careful consideration of the nature of dealing with the character and spiritual interests of members by a sessional court.

About four months since a meeting was called to elect a Pastor, and the candidate not being much known, and an opportunity of hearing him being too limited to satisfy all, that he was the most suitable person we could procure; on a motion to elect a Pastor, I was so far successful in suggesting several amendments, as finally to prevent an election as Pastor, but securing an opportunity to employ him six months.

At this meeting the ladies were again appealed to, to vote—and a motion made to that effect, which I had not the slightest agency in introducing—but when brought forward, I maintained my former position on that subject—when the vote was taken, by acclamation, instead of by ballot, no one, not even myself, voted against it, and it was recorded unanimous; but it is far from the fact, that it is the unanimous opinion of the congregation.

On the evening of March 13th, another meeting was called for the election of Pastor—the candidate being the same as before.

An informal vote was taken by ballot, simply to test the state of feeling previous to any discussion or exciting occurrence. The result was 68 for, and 24 against going in to the election. Males present about 30 to 35.

The minority being so large, a pause ensued; the meeting apparently not discerning whether to go forward or backward. At this juncture, without questioning the right of ladies to vote, I suggested, as this was informal, and merely for information, that the sense of the males be taken separately. The moderator, a clergyman, and another who was favorable to the candidate, thought it proper if desired, and saw no objection to it; but others thought differently and opened a debate, about the rights and qualifications of ladies to vote. I adduced the cases of the Church in Charleston and New York as evidence of the

practice there, and that the ladies were probably as much respected in those places as here.

The person who made the motion at the former meeting was *slightly excited* that the question was raised after the motion he had made—it will be observed that the question of the right to vote was not touched—but in this incidental way, I was instrumental in its introduction into discussion, but never before since the first decision. So I cannot be chargeable with agitating this question.

I took the liberty of saying to the person referred to, "that his having made the motion that ladies vote, constituted no reason why I should not allude to it if I saw proper." This, with the remark that when he made the motion, the only argument he used in its favor was, that "in some parts of the country it was advocated that ladies ought to vote at all our popular elections," which seemed as though he favored Fourierism, which he probably would not like to admit, may have led to my being charged with a "high handed dictatorial course," by one whose letter I probably shall copy in this narrative.

The subsequent votes on the election of Pastor was as follows, viz:

Shall we proceed to elect a Pastor? On rising—Males, Yes, 18; no females up. Against the election, Males 11; no females.

On the final vote by ballot, the candidate received 74 votes; against him 31 votes—a minority of one third—and only about one third, to one half, of the congregation being present.

This minority being so large—and I believing it unsafe to settle him—announced how I voted, and took occasion to direct the attention to the peculiar state of the interests involved in further action. The feelings of a majority were to be respected—the interests of the candidate were to be suitably protected—and the rights of the minority were to be considered; also, the church in its varied interests was to be contemplated with solicitude and moderation. I then took a review of some of the events referred to here—gave some suggestions about the duties of Elders to the people, and of the people to them—complained that events had been allowed to exert such an influ-

ence among some of our members—of the improper ex-
citement on the subjects on which we entertained differen-
ces of opinion; and that my own religious feelings had
been wounded, and my official relation in some measure
endangered in its proper usefulness, by the misguided ac-
ion and prejudice arising from the incidents referred to, in
hemselves not sufficient to excuse it. In this review of
he past, I proposed that one and all should endeavor to
mbibe the true spirit of Christianity, and overlook all past
differences; and having left our old church and for the first
ime met in the new one in a congregational meeting, we
hould endeavor to act under the present emergency in a
pirit of Christian compromise.

I therefore suggested to the majority not to urge prose-
uting a call under so large a minority, and gave reasons,
nd examined the separate interests involved; and then
lso suggested if a motion should be made, not to prose-
ute the call, that the minority should unite with the ma-
ority and invite the candidate to remain a longer period—
ne year from the time he was originally invited. This
ourse was acceded to, and then the way was open for
alm reflection, neither party had entirely lost their wish-
s; a submissive, teachable, humble spirit, exercised by
ll, might have resulted in unanimity, peace and prosper-
y.

But alas! I had been the speaking instrument of the
inority, and the leading ones in the majority were badly
sappointed; what had failed under majorities was gain-
d by the minority, under the wise provision of the consti-
tion of our church. The case had now assumed an as-
ect that decided me to cease acting as Ruling Elder. I
ad previously decided it desirable, and should have done
or left the church for my own peace of mind, but for a
sinclination to change or take the novel course of ceasing
act in my official relation.

That my official relation had not suffered in any res-
ct, except from the few referred to, I am fully satisfied,
d even up to the time of my resignation of active ser-
ce, I have no idea or belief, that in my official charac-
r I had become unacceptable to any considerable num-
r, even with all the influence a few could use to effect

such a result. But I assure the few to whom I refer, that I was no longer willing to exercise the office of Ruling Elder, and sent the session the following notice, to wit:

March 16, 1848.

S—— H—— Esq.

My Dear Brother:—

The prayer meeting last evening I enjoyed as one of rather more than usual interest, and thought brother H's. remarks very good, but on some points unusually emphatic.

I extremely regret that past occurrences in our church have had a tendency to disturb the kind relation and sympathy that ought to exist among the members of session and in the congregation. My own religious feelings have been grieved; and fearing a continuance of similar results, and desiring peace of mind, more calm enjoyment in my religious experience, and a deeper spirituality, it has been impressed on my mind very strongly, that I could better secure the results desired by omitting to meet with the session for the present, or taking any responsible action in our church affairs, except as a private member, until a different state of things shall appear to render it more clearly a duty.

Be good enough to convey this conclusion to the other brethren of the session, and allow me to assure you I have no feelings towards any one of the session, or any member of the church, inconsistent with the truest Christian fellowship, however I may disapprove of the course pursued and opinions held on various subjects, the discussion of which has tended to the present state of things.

Very respectfully, Yours,

J—— H—— R——

About a week after this notice, the member of session to whom it was sent, called and conversed as to the extent I viewed the notice. He also informed me that a letter was sent to the session some days after my notice, requesting my resignation. The following is a copy—the writer's name I omit out of delicacy to his feelings, trusting he will in due time see cause for Christian fellowship in his feelings to me, as he may be assured I have to him.

believe he has no valid ground for any thing short of it, nor do I view his letter as a bar to my respectful regard to him as a Christian brother whenever he shall manifest a similar sympathy:

COPY OF HIS LETTER.

"*To the Session of the Presbyterian Church of* —— ——

"GENTLEMEN:—The course pursued by Elder J—— H—— R—— at our congregational meetings, in attributing improper motives to members of the church—his high handed dictatorial course—destroys his usefulness. Many of us think we cannot be profited by him as a leader. He is in my opinion unacceptable in his official character to a majority of the congregation. I have therefore to ask that you request him to resign his office of Elder which he holds in the church. I am firmly convinced the peace and harmony of the members depends upon his compliance.

Respectfully Yours,

A—— H——

March 16, 1848.

I make two remarks on this letter—

1st. The charge of my having "attributed improper motives to members of the church at our congregational meetings," is wholly erroneous. I never entertained the belief that dishonest motives were impelling any member; but only improper action and management, in securing their wishes, without a proper christian regard to the wishes, feelings, and rights of others. To this end I did intend to complain, and at the last congregational meeting did so, in as proper a manner as I deemed my official relation to the church called for; hoping a reference in that manner would answer to correct a censurable practice with a very select few in the church.

2d. It is surpassing strange that the writer of this letter should think he could not "be profited by him (me) as a leader." One who rarely—scarcely ever, enters our prayer meetings, either on Sabbath morning, or during the week, and who was never known to take the least part in those exercises, to my knowledge—it is strange, I repeat, to understand how he could mean to apply his thoughts on

this point. If he rarely came within the influence of the leaders in our religious meetings—how could it be said that he could not be profited by any one leader, the one to whom he refers having been delicately careful not to lead in those meetings as often as a regular rotation would have caused him? but does he mean my leading the mind in prayer to the throne of Grace would be unprofitable? of this he could better have judged by more experience in the exercise. I had supposed a truly spiritual feeling in a christian could forget trifles when it was endeavoring, with kindred spirits to unite in childlike supplication to the Throne of Grace for the descent of the Holy Spirit on the waiting worshippers.

But perhaps it was in our congregational meetings he thought he could not be profited—for be it remembered, he made the motion that "Ladies vote," and to which I had incidentally caused a reference. If this was intended as the unprofitable part of my official relation to him, it may be well to apprise him that the resignation he seemed rather "dictatorial" in demanding, even if secured, would not have in the slightest degree interfered with my relations to him, or others, in our congregational meetings. When he meets me there, it is not in my official character as Elder —although on my part it is ever becoming to consider that character—but he meets me as one of the congregation.and if I have a better cause to maintain than he, or think I can suggest any desirable modification in any thing he or others propose, I shall feel a perfect right to act accordingly.

A member of the congregation informed me that, some days after my notice to the session, a lady effort for names, to petition for my resignation was making, but they met with so little encouragement on calling with their petition, that he supposed they had given up the enterprise, and I am led to infer this is the case, for a committee of two from the Session calling on me on the 27th March, said none had been presented—they thought it had been given up.

This committee called to know my views as to the extent and meaning of my notice of 16th March, when I delivered them the following letter prepared to send the session, viz:

March 27, 1848.

S—— H——, Esq.

[For the Session.]

Dear Brother :—

I return the volume borrowed of you. "Miller on Ruling Elders." He says, on page 274, an elder may, "From ill health, or for other reasons, cease, if he think proper, to perform the active duties of the office."

On page 298 : "When an Elder thus wishes to resign his station, he is to give official notice of his desire to the Session; they are to declare, if they think proper, their acceptance of his resignation : the whole transaction is to be distinctly recorded in the Sessional Book ; and report made to the Presbytery, that the individual in question has ceased to be an acting member of that Session."

Further directions in the same chapter, and to the same end are given, which clearly indicate the simple course to pursue in relation to my notice of 16th of March, that I had voluntarily ceased to act for the present as Elder.

Allow me in conclusion to say that, this volume ought to be read, and studied by the Eldership, and its heavenly inculcations urged on the members of our church, by the moral power and influence that a Session ought to possess, and exercise. My desire is that your councils will in future be guided by union, wisdom, and grace, and so manifested that the people may feel there is a moral influence at the head of our church affairs, that ought to be looked to as a guide for all movements, in which the spiritual or pecuniary interests of the church are concerned.

With these principles, and qualifications to carry them out, with the energy the spirit's influence is calculated to inspire, when there is union and harmony in council for the best welfare of Zion, we may hope for better results in the moral and spiritual condition of our church than seems to have been the case for some time, and tending to worse in the future.

The charge of a "*High handed dictatorial course*" in our congregational meetings contained in a letter sent the session, signed by one individual in relation to myself, I pro-

test against as wholly fallacious; and object to other parts as unsound and containing a request strongly spiced with dictation, giving his opinion as evidence to sustain so serious an act as he desired.

That I have been, and am in my feelings and principles strongly opposed to such a "course" I frankly admit, and also admit that the mind of loose observers may have misconstrued an opposition to arbitrary and dictatorial movements, as the very essence of dictation itself! My feelings and principles are for open frank discussion, and fair open action in all church interests, that all things may be done in a way to avoid suspicion of management, and that a hearty concurrence shall be secured by as many of the congregation as possible; then after this course is pursued, I go heartily for the decision of a majority, except in some peculiar case where the rights of minorities claim, on the principles of christian concession and brotherly love, that the majority shall not press their wishes unreasonably—without essential detriment to them—upon the minority, to their certain discomfort.

Such a case may arise in the choice of a pastor, and the constitution of our church, wisely provides for such an event.

I close by an extract from "Miller," page 299.

"No church ought to be burthened by the incumbency of an unpopular and obstinate Elder, who instead of edifying, is injuring it. And on the other hand, no innocent and really exemplary Elder ought to be abandoned to the fury of popular prejudice, and permitted to be trampled under feet, when, perhaps he ought to be sustained and honored for his fidelity."

Most respectfuly and truly yours,

J—— H—— R——.

On the 28th of March I received the following notice, viz:

March 28, 1848.

Mr. J—— H—— R——:

It becomes my duty to inform you that the tender of resignation of your office as Elder in this church has been accepted by the Session, and placed upon record, and that

the same will be reported to Presbytery, to meet at ——— on the 4th day of April next.

By order of the Session,

S—— N——, *Clerk.*

How far the Session would have gone under the request of one petitioner, and a few out-door expressions—had my resignation not have been explained, as all in effect that could be given—namely, ceasing to act for the present—is known better to them than me; but I drew from the committee that if I did not view it as a resignation, they were authorized to request it. Now although I respect individually the members of Session in their persons, I cannot believe they took the enlightened view of the nature of the solemn relation they were dealing with, that they ought—and such as a little study of "Miller on Ruling Elders," would have given them, or such of them as were prepared for such a request.

One of the committee, on my enquiring on what ground they were prepared to make such a request, stated he had heard nothing expressed but respect for me as Elder—While the other seemed at a loss to explain, but when I referred to the one petitioner, and the rumored failure of the lady effort, as too slight evidence to warrant such a "plenipotentiary" power as seemed to have been delegated to the two brethren. When it appeared as though I was likely to be too severe in my rebuke for such conduct, he finally stated that there were as many as twelve or fourteen who thought I ought to resign! Can it be, thought I—can it be, that the brethren, although I have differed with them on important principles of sessional practice, have become so far lost to the sacredness of their position in such a juncture, as to presume thus to hazard the usefulness and influence of a brother Elder on so slight a pretext,—and even that the result in a good degree of disappointed success in the election of a pastor?

This state of things must be my excuse for unfolding some of the causes that have been operating to prepare for such an issue.

Every member of session may have so participated in the discussions at our congregational meetings, as to have entertained precisely the same feelings of the one petitioner

—whose letter I have transcribed—and a few more with them. But does not the question arise, from what has this excited opinion arisen? is it for discussing questions on which there may be an honest difference of opinion, and in those discussions, if he produces more reason, argument, and evidence than others, and if he is rudely answered in debate, and has ability and courage to defend himself and his cause, must he on that account.—when in the language of "Miller," page 298, "in a moment of prejudice or passion from the popular feeling, without any just ground or blame on his part" be requested by his brethren of the session to resign! I have not so learned the principles of the Gospel, nor the common principles of common sense.—Supposing for argument sake, I had so debated questions in the Session, or in the congregational meetings, that my brethren feared I would mar the peace of Zion, or become unacceptable in my official character; would it not have been their first duty to admonish in private, and in our Sessional meetings calmly examine the tendency of any indiscretions in debate or otherwise? No such course was ever attempted—probably no good cause existed why the attempt should have been made. On the other hand, was it not a duty the Session owed themselves—their brother Elder—the peace of the church—the best interest of sound religious practice, to have gone to the writer of the letter who requested a resignation, and labored with him, to reconcile his feelings to an officer in the church of our Lord; and also to have gone and used the moral influence of their official relation to the church, and have reconciled the differences that may have arisen, either from transient and slight causes, or even of a serious character.

I have not learned on any principle of propriety, that the christian character of a private member of the church, is so lightly to be tampered with, as to be even arraigned before the Session for admonition or censure for anything that can be substantiated in regard to my christian character or official relations to this church; yet it would seem by the admission of one of the committee, they came clothed with power to request my resignation!! a request that implies some serious matter touching a man's character, qualifications, piety, usefulness &c., &c., which without an ex-

planation would be calculated to operate unfavorably, and in some instances be a means of crushing a man's influence as a christian, and in very many respects be a serious annoyance. In this case, however, I am happy to say no such results are apprehended. for my resignation was purely voluntary and had been resolved on more than once, and so far as the circumstances are known here, I feel neither my christian character or influence will be disturbed.

I mean no personal disrespect to the members of session —a majority governs—who favored the intention I complain of. I know not, but from the relations that exist, I am satisfied that this intended request is, or will be understood out of the session. If they have acted in a way to give their official sanction to the request of the "one petitioner," and thus tacitly say I am "unacceptable in my official character to a majority of the congregation," they must permit me to protest—in the most solemn manner—against its propriety or their right to do it, under the circumstances.

Our congregation numbers probably over three hundred. Do the session mean to convey the idea to Presbytery or the community, that over one hundred and fifty persons in our congregation believe, or for a moment think. any thing like this rash petitioner? I say as a Christian man, I doubt whether there were ten adult persons in the congregation at the time his letter was written, who would have been willing calmly to say what this one petitioner has said. The truth is, with the exception of two or three individuals, whose path has been a little obstructed by my open action according to my own judgment, I am confident a cordial feeling would be cheerfully given to me in an official or other character.

The circumstances must be my excuse for self estimation on this occasion, it is one of the last things I am accustomed to present.

My reference to this "one petitioner" so often, has not been made with any design to offend him, but because it suited my reference to the evidence on which the session acted better than otherwise. My feelings to him are expressed in connection with his letter.

Now what is the object of this pamphlet, and what is calculated to be its tendency?

1st. The vindication and protection of the writer, by an explanation of some of the causes of his resignation.

2d. To lead other church sessions and congregations, where this pamphlet may circulate, to consider the events to which allusion has been made, that they may avoid similar evils; the existence of which cannot fail to endanger vital Godliness and christian sympathy.

3d. That the Presbytery having an oversight and supervisory control of the church and Eldership of which I am a member, may understand some of the evils existing within their bounds, and that a wise conservative influence may be exerted to restore any lost fellowship that may have occurred without sufficient reason, or any intimation of a want of moral character or integrity on either side.

4th. That as Presbytery will meet and the resignation be reported before this pamphlet can be published, and as no effort may be made to secure the conservative influence of its interference at that time: and as the spiritual interests and fellowship of the members of the church call for prayerful solicitude to unite all hearts, who hope to be united in heaven; it is urged that so desirable results may be sought after and prayed for, instead of any unnecessary widening of a breach that may become impassable.

5th. The suppression of all names and places, in order that the particular church in which these occurrences have taken place may be unknown, except within its immediate vicinity, that as little unpleasantness may be experienced as the case seems to admit of in this mode of *Reformation* and *Protection*.

That the great Head of the church will so over-rule all things for the glory of His name, and the final salvation of all his professed people, is the desire and prayer of one who is still, although ceasing to act as such,

A RULING ELDER.

Northern Indiana, March 30, 1848.

FURTHER EXPLANATION.

The foregoing narrative was prepared in its original form to present to Presbytery for information. At that time it was not known by me that the session would be willing to allow of a voluntary resignation after the one petitioner's letter was received, and the lady effort to the same end was announced. Finding it could not be printed in time for the meeting of Presbytery on the 4th of April, it was modified for a more extended circulation and handed to the printer before Presbytery met.

Supposing it possible Presbytery might judge I ought to have appealed to its interference for the correction of the evils alluded to, and desiring an adjustment for harmony in the church, I addressed Presbytery on the subject so as to open the way for the session to manifest any healing spirit that might exist with itself or the few whose influence it might consult, to wit:

April 5, 1848.

To the Presbytery of —— ——

Dear Brethren:—The undersigned regret the necessity of addressing you on a subject of discord in the — Presbyterian church of —— —— of which we are members.

One of the Ruling Elders of our church, and a portion of its members have, without any charge implicating the moral character of any one, become in some measure estranged in their feelings. The original cause of this estrangement in some considerable degree, grew out of a decision of J—— H—— R——, (the Elder referred to) when chairman of one of our congregational meetings, that ladies were not entitled to vote. The discussion of this and other subjects at our congregational meetings has caused an undue excitement, and with other collateral causes so affected his feelings as to induce him voluntarily to resign his active service as Elder, and to cause one person to petition the session that they should request his resignation; how many more may have desired the same, we do not here express an opinion, as a diversity of view may be entertained on that point.

We feel that the cause of religion in our own church

may be injured by the present state of things; and not believing there are any serious obstacles to a union of feeling, and hearty christian fellowship and social intercourse, desire the interposition of Presbytery to effect so desirable an object.

We therefore desire a committee of Presbytery to confer with a few members of our church, and if they think the way clear, that Presbytery adopt the following method of healing all differences alluded to.

1st. That Presbytery recommend to the church and congregation, that in their future congregational meetings, the qualifications of voters shall be based on the principles laid down in a work of Samuel Miller, D. D., of the Princeton Theological Seminary, entitled, "Miller on Ruling Elders."

2d. That Presbytery recommend J—— H—— R—— to withdraw his resignation, and A—— H—— to withdraw his request that the session advise him to resign, and a record be made of the same on the records of the session, and he be requested to resume the active duties of Ruling Elder.

3d. That this petition to Presbytery, together with the action of Presbytery on the case, be publicly read to the congregation on Sabbath morning next, from the Pulpit by a member of Presbytery, and accompanied with suitable remarks, calculated to unite the cheerful and hearty cooperation of all the members of the church, in union, christian fellowship, and social intercourse.

The above draft, dear brethren, is drawn and presented by myself to Presbytery as my petition to that body; that they consider the propriety of handing it to the delegate from session in attendance on Presbytery, or such other member of session as they think proper, in order that it may be presented to each member of session to sign, together with Mr. A—— H—— and such of the ladies of the church as they may judge proper, in order to insure the harmonious results so much to be desired for the interests of the church and the christian fellowship of its members.

An attention to it this morning, and the harmonious action of session, I am fully persuaded, may during the day settle every difficulty, so that the Presbyterial prayer

meeting this evening may be thronged with hearts in sweet harmony, uniting in aspirations of prayer and praise to the throne of heaven for the descent of the Spirit on his waiting children. In this I can heartily unite, and hope a similar sympathy will be manifested by the persons referred to, and the exercise of the conservative influence of Presbytery exerted. Most Respectfully,

Yours in the Gospel,

J—— H—— R——.

The Presbytery appointed a committee who conferred with members of session as they informed me, and finding the way not clear to adjust the differences as I proposed, made the following report, to wit: "The committee to whom was referred the letter of brother J—— H—— R—— to this body, beg leave to report the following:— That in accordance with the "desire" expressed in that letter, the committee did "confer with a few members" of the Presbyterian church of —— ——, but that they do not "think the way clear," nor that it is expedient for Presbytery to adopt the method suggested for healing the differences spoken of in that letter."

The committee informed me that the subject ought to come before them in a different form—by way of a complaint, or with charges in such form as to institute an investigation—to warrant Presbyterial action, and suggested that I adopt that method; but I informed them there was nothing to charge on either side, and any investigation of the differences would probably result in a tedious exciting procedure, that would amount in reality to nothing at all to warrant the undertaking; the whole difficulty having arisen, and been brought to its present form, by causes wholly unworthy of such a result; therefore I had nothing to propose further than what was expressed in my letter; a willingness on my part to unite in some honorable, liberal, and I trusted, a christian course, to unite the discordant elements existing in the church.

My complaint against the session for "tacitly endorsing the letter" of the "one petitioner," by sending a committee clothed with "authority to request a resignation," would in some measure be unfounded so far as the sessional record would show, for that would indicate a voluntary resignation, appended to which was the request of this one

petitioner, but no record of the authority to "request a resignation;" therefore to sustain a complaint on that ground, would have subjected me to proof from the persons complained of, and which if not voluntarily given, probably could not have been required. And even if admitted, and a censure had been given by Presbytery to the session, for acting hastily and on insufficient grounds, for so serious an imputation, it would not have healed the cause of the disease, but in all probability administered to its fatality.

Therefore, being indisposed to the litigation necessarily consequent on such a course, I preferred appealing directly to the understanding and unbiassed verdict of those who may choose to give attention enough to this narrative to understand the peculiar and unenviable position in which circumstances have placed me, and under which many would have sunk in silence, although like myself, unwilling martyrs!

At this crisis I was in doubt what course I ought to pursue, but learning this evening, the 8th of April, that another congregational meeting was expected to be called to endeavor to elect the candidate so recently opposed by so large a minority, it appeared to me that a new agitation of the same subject that had so recently brought us into difficulty, would likely widen the breach still more.—Therefore, to leave the result unconnected with me in any future consequences growing out of the meeting, I decided to leave the church, procured a dismission the same evening, and now feel a relief from the corroding responsibilities of a disunited connexion.

More than self will and personal considerations, induce me to this publication. However feeble an effort to effect such a result, it is intended and designed as a delicate exposure of unsound practice, and an unworthy managing spirit in the church, that however tolerated in the political world, by worldlings, is almost a sure evidence of a waning spirituality, and sooner or later of a divided church.—In the language of the New York Observer, "a divided heart is feeble with God, and a divided church has no moral power."

A RULING ELDER.

April 8, 1848.

T. Tigar, Printer, Fort Wayne, Ia.